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This paper delves into the multifaceted dimensions of human existence, intertwining art, philosophy, and science. Beginning with the German distinction between *Körper* and *Leib*, it navigates historical measurement standards, investigations into the soul's weight, and the evolving understanding of consciousness. From Dr Duncan MacDougall's meticulous measurements on his quest for the soul's weight, the paper engages with the intersection of science and metaphysics. It critically examines views on the anatomical seat of the soul, challenging traditional notions and explorations of consciousness and its neural underpinnings. Drawing parallels between the human body and technical systems, the paper contemplates the profound interconnectedness of body, soul, consciousness, and perception.

Name:

58106g WEIGHT OF SOUL

Material:

Plastination, silicone, resin, steel, taxidermy

Fotos: by Manuel Wagner

Exhibition: Paul Scherzer Gallery Halle, 2023





»In this context, the body is viewed as an object, a visible and tangible entity, an instrument that can be interacted with and manipulated.«





and its integration. Tononi argues that consciousness depends not only on the amount of information, but also on the way this information is connected within the system.

When I reflect on the perspective of a taxidermist and artist, where I dissect the body into its individual components and treat it as material, fewer thoughts about the examination or discovery of the soul come to mind. Nevertheless, during the reconstruction and staging of a sculpture, I encounter similar considerations. The addition of ›life‹ and ›character‹ to a taxidermy specimen proves to be a creative ability of the taxidermist. When observing taxidermy specimens in museums, the animal is often presented in a heroic body position, whether it be in the act of hunting, leaping, or displayed as a trophy on the wall. However, the death of the animal has stripped it of any gesture and vitality. Through taxidermy, it takes on a new identity. It's not the specimen itself that acquires a character, but rather the viewer projects one onto the specimen, derived from their own experiences and perceptions. The taxidermist, while the artist imparting expression to the taxidermy specimen, does so within the minds of the viewers. Consequently, it is nearly impossible, for instance, to perfectly reconstruct a deceased pet as it was in life, as movements, character, expression, and ›life‹ can hardly return to the empty body. The taxidermy specimen lacks a soul, but the artist and taxidermist can simulate one. This is something art can achieve that science cannot, as, in my opinion, the soul is not a physical entity. But maybe the artist can paint a likeness.

»Der Körper ist nicht mehr zurückzuverwandeln in den Leib. Er bleibt die Leiche, auch wenn er noch so ertüchtigt wird« (Horkheimer et. al. 1991: 248).

In conclusion, this exploration of the body, consciousness, and measurement standards unveils a dynamic interplay between the tangible and intangible aspects of human existence. From meticulous measurements to the controversial pursuit of the soul's weight by Duncan MacDougall, the discourse on the body's essence extends to modern hypotheses linking consciousness to information and energy.

The intricate dance of the brain's neural processes and the evolving understanding of consciousness challenge traditional notions. From Descartes's pineal gland to contemporary theories like Integrated Information Theory (IIT), our exploration underscores the complexity of consciousness and the quest for a tangible understanding of the intangible. The quest for quantifiable data, whether it's the weight of the soul or the neural processes underlying consciousness, reflects the enduring human curiosity. While the notion of a measurable soul remains contentious, current insights lead us to a more profound understanding of the interactions within the brain and their role in constructing our individual realities. The structure of human perception shares parallels with technical systems where physical stimuli are transformed into sensory perceptions.

The relationship between the body, soul, consciousness, and perception remains a captivating and expansive field of research. It continues to challenge and enrich our understanding of the fundamentals of human existence, selfhood, and our place in the world. As we journey further into the depths of these mysteries, we uncover not only the intricacies of our physical and mental realms but also the profound interconnectedness of our human experience.

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